

January 2021

State Director's Angle **Competence. Courage. Compassion.**

By State Director Michael Leach



We have been able to navigate through the ups and downs of our journey with your dedication to children, families and adults. I knew in April 2019, there was no better place to be than DSS if I wanted to make a difference in SC. This is the very same belief that continues to drive me today. I believe that each of us must find meaning in our work. The best work happens when you know that it's not just work, but something that will improve other people's lives. This is the opportunity that can drive each of us.

There have been and will continue to be many challenges, and we know we have not done everything perfectly, and things may not work as planned. We appreciate your patience and understanding as we have navigated this pandemic and done our best to maintain grace under pressure and continued service to clients.

Additionally, I know that many of us at DSS, along with our families, friends, stakeholders and partners, may be troubled about the circumstances in our national politics that we have witnessed over the past few weeks. While all of us have a right to express our opinions and feelings, we should encourage one another to avoid unproductive, unhelpful or inflammatory rhetoric and instead devote ourselves to honest, informed, reasoned, and measured commentary.

I continue to be amazed at the immense progress being made daily, in every division of our agency as well as systems changes we are making together with our many partner agencies across the state. There is a clear transformation happening at every level of the system, one that values engaging the clients we serve in development and decision making, and one that is focused on identifying and adapting outdated processes to streamline the work and improve the quality of what we do. This continued transformation is critical to help our clients across the state, to promote the well-being for children, families and adults and to make sure their needs are met. While we have seen better outcomes in all program areas, we are hungry to do more. We have to continue to innovate, and change so that the people we serve can thrive.

Governor McMaster's GEER Funding Boosts SCDSS Programs and Services

On January 5th, Governor Henry McMaster was joined by SCDSS Director Michael Leach and others to announce a \$19.9 million

education and workforce training investment in the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund. GEER funds are provided to states through the CARES Act. They are allocated by the Governor to state agencies and other entities that have a role in educating South Carolinians that have been adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The grants will be distributed between the Department of Social Services (DSS), the South Carolina Technical College System, the Office of First Steps, and the Department of Education. The grants will provide job training, give educational resources to foster children, and prepare children in poverty for kindergarten.



The Department of Social Services will receive \$4,913,800 from GEER funds. This targeted funding will be used to address the educational needs of foster care children and youth in group homes. The award will fund the following for the approximately 600 foster care children and youth in our 46 group homes:

- Purchase and deploy electronic devices to group home settings at \$225,000;
- Increase bandwidth for the 46 group homes at \$88,800;
- Provide tutoring services for children and youth in group home settings at \$4,320,000; and
- Fund special education services for children and youth with disabilities in group home settings at \$280,000.

Director Leach commented on the funding by saying "Governor McMaster has allocated GEER funding to strengthen & solidify remote learning for children & youth in our state's Group Home settings. Group Homes across the state are responsible for assisting with the educational success of foster children & youth placed in their facilities. This responsibility is especially heightened with the increase in virtual learning, due to the pandemic."

Watch Director Leach's full remarks [here](#).



SCDSS Employees Of The Month • January 2021



Row 1: Morgan Nalley, Legal Services; Johnny Mangum, Economic Services; Linda Smith, Accountability, Data & Research; Row 2: Daniel Covey, Finance; Kristi Jewel, Child Welfare Services; Adam Ellison, APS; Paul LeBarron, Child Support Services

January 2021 Employees of the Month Recognized with virtual lunch

Seven DSS professionals were recognized by Director Michael Leach as Employees of the Month.

Recognized for their hard work and leading with Competence, Courage and Compassion for the month of January are (l to r, 1st row): Morgan Nalley, Legal Services, State Office; Johnny Mangum, Economic Services, Chesterfield County; Linda Smith, Accountability, Data & Research, State Office; (l to r, 2nd row): Daniel Covey, Finance Services, State Office; Kristi Jewel, Child Welfare Services, Camden; Adam Ellison, Adult Protective Services, Cherokee/Spartanburg; and, Paul LeBarron, Child Support Services, Lowcountry Region.

The recognition celebration with the Director was held virtually due to the ongoing pandemic. Each honoree has the use of a

designated parking space for the entire month. They also received a DSS lapel pin, a gift card for purchasing lunch during the virtual luncheon and an announcement sent to their local newspaper. Congratulations, all!



CHILD WELFARE SERVICES



Leading the Way by Expanding Support to Families

DSS efforts to strengthen families were highlighted in a recent article by The Annie E. Casey Foundation. The piece focused on DSS and other stakeholders' work to build up our capacity for prevention. That's done by providing earlier support and services to build family strength and avoid the need for involvement from the child protection system. This approach is part of a national multi-year prevention effort called "Thriving Families, Safer Children."

The initiative engages young people and families to learn firsthand about their concerns. Then, by collaborating with community organizations, providers, the judiciary and other partners, the program can provide tailored support that meets the unique needs of families.

Michael Leach, DSS State Director, had this to say, "Over and over again, people are telling us that strong families are critical to the success of our state. So, we need to work with communities differently. Let's strengthen families. Let's help them heal on their terms."

Karen Bryant, DSS Deputy State Director of Child Welfare Services, says the state is working toward three goals:

- Reduce the number of young people going into foster care by building up prevention strategies available in the community;
- Support kinship caregivers, so that if children and youth must live apart from their parents — relatives have the means to provide them with love, stability and support;
- Drive down use of group placements. Research shows that children and youth thrive in families, not in institutions or group homes.

DSS is also providing new sources of support for kinship caregivers and building our child and family team meetings to involve parents and relatives in solving problems to meet their needs. Among the benefits: the ability to care for children in the least restrictive, family-like settings whenever possible — which is a key DSS priority.

You can read the entire article [here](#).

1,532
Children
were reunified
with families
in 2020



643
New
Foster
Homes
in 2020



(Foster Home data as of 1/22/2021. View more information on the [Foster Care Data Dashboard](#). Numbers updated daily.)

446
Adoptions
were finalized
in 2020

Some adoptions continue to be finalized



(Adoptions data as of 1/22/2021. View the [Finalized Adoptions Dashboard](#) for daily updated numbers.)

DSS Joins Attorney General in Effort to Fight Human Trafficking

On January 11th, Michael Leach, DSS State Director, joined SC Attorney General Alan Wilson and other leaders for a news conference at the State House to take part in the release of the annual South Carolina Human Trafficking Task Force report. The report showed 139 cases of human trafficking and 179 victims reported in South Carolina in 2020.

The Department of Social Services has been working, both before and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, to find and help minors who are victims of both sex and labor human trafficking.

Director Leach laid out the agency's goals in his comments to the media. "We plan to continue to develop staff capacity through a continuous training and on-going refinement of policies and procedures; expand placement and specialized treatment options for youth impacted by child trafficking through collaboration with national and state subject matter experts; expand support services for frontline staff, therapeutic foster parents and children and youth who are the victims of child trafficking," said Director Leach.

You can watch Director Leach's full comments [here](#). To learn more about the ongoing efforts by the Human Trafficking Task Force, visit [here](#).



CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES



Coming Soon!

Child Support Customer Service Portal for Parents

Whether you pay or receive child support, a new customer service online tool will soon be available to view important case information – any time, any day.

View payment information, hearing dates, established enforcement and system updates affecting your case. Customers will also be able to update contact and employment information.

QUICK Application Aids in Child Support Cases

By Tim Mose, Child Support Services Division Director

The coming Child Support Customer Service Portal, scheduled for rollout by mid-March, and virtual customer service kiosks, which will be available to walk-ins in all offices are among the exciting initiatives underway by the [Child Support Services Division \(CSSD\)](#) that will benefit both staff and our customers.

Another exciting piece of news that will again help both customers and staff is the QUICK application. Installation took place on Wednesday, January 20th with some of the staff receiving training the following day. QUICK (Query Interstate Kids) is a secure federal portal that will afford key staff the ability to look up information made available by other states on their Child Support cases in real time. Its role for staff will be comparable to that of the Customer Service Portal to customers. Staff will be able to inquire on case participants, financial information, a case activities summary, and contact information. Again, this will be real-time inquiry, not one slowed by mail, email, or faxes. This will speed some aspects of customer service tremendously, and will allow our state, as well as others, to spot inconsistencies in case data.

Delays in intergovernmental communication, although generally not as common as they used to be, are still one of the bigger challenges when it comes to effective child support services and customer service. We anticipate that QUICK will be a significant step in the right direction. CSSD is continually looking for ways to improve customer service. More updates to come!



EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

Comprehensive Survey of Childhood Workforce Published

By Michele Bowers, Division of Early Care & Education Director



The South Carolina Early Childhood Workforce Survey conducted in 2018 is the largest, most comprehensive survey of the state's early childhood workforce, representing feedback from over 4000 practitioners across the state. The results are the voice of our diverse early childhood workforce. It encompasses a varied field of professionals, including leaders and staff who work directly with young children in center, school and home-based settings. They work as administrators, teaching staff or family child care educators.

The survey was funded by the Division of Early Care and Education, SCDSS. This project was directed by a multi-disciplinary team of DSS staff including Millie McDonald, Noelle McInerney (who was project manager), Melissa Starker, Debra Session and Catherine Haselden. It also included key partners such as Melissa McDonald from SC Child Care Resource and Referral Network and Dr. Vasanthi Rao from the Yvonne & Schuyler Moore Child Development Research Center at the University of South Carolina.

Maintaining a current and accurate picture of the early childhood workforce provides valuable information to measure the status and maintain the progress of ECE initiatives. Therefore, this study can serve as a valuable planning tool for South Carolina communities and early childhood organizations as they develop policies and strategies to improve the quality of early care and education settings and learning outcomes for young children.

This study reveals some areas of promise within the early care and education field. It also points to some significant challenges. For example, participants reported that they have high satisfaction levels with their work, however; they are still making wages that are far below those of their public-school counterparts. In addition, more than 60% have an academic degree, however, only 34% of those are in early childhood. The issues facing the ECE workforce are complex. Efforts must be systemic, sustained and evidence-based leading to innovative and transformative approaches. Ultimately, DSS is confident that continued, multi-stakeholder commitment to South Carolina's early childhood workforce offers tremendous promise in transforming the lives of young children.

The Executive Summary and Full report can be found [here](#).

Palmetto Pre-K Jamboree is Coming in March 2021

Experience an empowering day of learning to support and uplift the community that helps young children blossom and grow. Any and all Pre-K/preschool teachers, support staff, and administrators are invited to join the virtual event. Following the event, toolkits, including a Palmetto Pre-K t-shirt, will be given to all attendees! Join us for the virtual event, **Friday, March 5, 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.** to increase your understanding and abilities to support young children as they bloom. All attendees can qualify for SC DSS credit hours. [Sign up now here](#).



Palmetto Pre-K Jamboree

Nurturing Community to Grow the Child

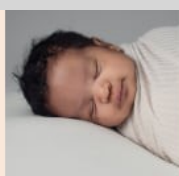
Palmetto Pre-K Agencies






Attention child care providers!

Join us for the first virtual Baby Jam, Friday, February 26, 2021! Together we will explore strategies and exercises to increase our resilience and well-being while creating an atmosphere for healthy child development and happy babies. [Register now here!](#)



SCPITC presents **BABY JAM**




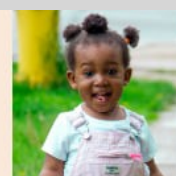
Nurturing Resiliency for Happy Babies

February 26, 2021
12 pm - 4:30 pm ONLINE

[Register Here.](#)

*Join us to learn how to manage your own well-being and
support the social-emotional health of infants and toddlers!*

Baby Jam is supported by the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative (PDG B-5), Grant Number 90TP0000-01-00, from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.



ADVISORY for PARENTS and CAREGIVERS of children learning at home...

The SC Department of Social Services must grant approval for temporary child care operations designed to support children during school-time care, e-learning care, virtual learning, and/or extended school time care due to schools not providing in-classroom instruction. [Learn more or apply for a temporary certificate to operate a school-age child care facility during the COVID-19 Pandemic.](#)



ADULT ADVOCACY

Protection. Respect. Independence.



Click here to visit our website to learn more about Adult Protective Services

Did you know...

900,000 residents in South Carolina are age 65 and older? That's 18% of the state's entire population and almost 75,000 of these senior adults live in poverty.

Adult Protective Services and Response to COVID-19

By Rick Knight, Director of Administration, Adult Protective Services

COVID-19 has affected all of DSS, and the impact on Adult Protective Services (APS) is no exception. Based on data from DHEC, 476 long-term care facilities have had at least one case of COVID-19 since they started tracking this information in April. That includes 95% of all nursing homes and 54% of all community long-term care/assisted living facilities. APS has been tracking COVID's effect on adults in our system during this time

as well. The number of APS adults in facilities that have had at least one case of COVID since April 2020 is 388. As of January 22, a total of 186 APS adults have tested positive for COVID – 71 have been in long-term care facilities, 39 in hospitals, and 18 in their homes. Included in this number are 31 APS adults who died from COVID-related illnesses and 27 adults whose APS cases are now closed, but who tested positive for COVID while their cases were active. Of the state's 46 counties, 38 have at least one APS adult who has tested positive for COVID.

Through all of this, APS case managers have continued to work diligently to conduct investigations and visits, as well as provide protective services. Many long-term care facilities and some hospitals stopped allowing visitors at some point during the pandemic, making visits difficult to conduct. While face-to-face visits are still conducted for investigations, APS case managers have been creative and resourceful to conduct telephone and virtual visits for protective services. We extend special thanks to all of the APS professionals for working through difficult and stressful times to continue serving our vulnerable adults!



ECONOMIC SERVICES

Family Assistance | Employment Services



DSS CONNECT Call Center Exemplifies Dedicated Service

Kaci Herrington-Garrett, DSS Connect Program Manager

The DSS Connect Call Center is the agency's toll-free, client services line for recipients of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and/or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) public assistance benefits. DSS Connect operates Monday-Friday

from 8:30am-4:00pm, providing case status updates, documenting and completing case changes, and managing case complaints. The DSS Connect Team also answers the Elderly Simplified Application Project (ESAP) and South Carolina Combined Application Project (SCCAP) toll-free line, which is dedicated to the agency's elderly and vulnerable SNAP population. On average, the DSS Connect call center answers 3,000-4,000 calls per week, with record high call volume during peak pandemic response in 2020.

The DSS Connect Team is passionate about helping others because some of us have been on the receiving end of the assistance provided by DSS. We do this work because we are passionate about DSS and have dedicated years of our lives to the agency. We work hard and we are constantly striving to be better than we were before because we understand the importance of the agency's mission: promoting the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and vulnerable adults, and helping individuals achieve stability and strengthening families.

Reach DSS Connect at **1-800-616-1309**. [Learn more information about DSS Family Assistance programs here.](#)



SNAP Online Food Purchasing

To encourage the practice of social distancing and reduce potential exposure to COVID-19, the USDA has authorized purchases of eligible food items online with an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card from Walmart, Amazon and ALDI. SCDSS will update as other retailers and independent grocers in SC become approved for online purchasing.

SCDSS Employment Services

The [SCDSS Division of Employment Services](#) works to support business owners who hire **SNAP** (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and **TANF** (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) program participants entering the workforce. When you hire our customers, you become eligible for a variety of benefits, incentives and supports designed to meet your specific needs. Hiring from DSS can provide both your business and your new employee a promising future. We assist with:

- Tax credit opportunities for employers
- Workforce Consultants statewide
- Vocational assessments
- Pre-screened job referrals
- Background screening
- Ongoing assistance



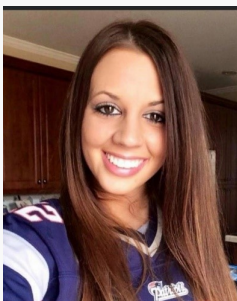
SCDSS Partner Spotlights

Family Connection of South Carolina Offers Support

As the pandemic continues, [Family Connection of South Carolina](#) is still open to assist families. The Family Information Center is working remotely with approved technology to continue to provide support, information, and in some cases, virtual in-person visits.



Family Information Center: 1-800-578-8750 (English); 1-888-808-7462 (Spanish); Monday-Friday, 8:30-5:00pm
FCSC [Online Referrals](#)
Dedicated [COVID-19 Webpage](#)



SC Foster Parent Association Social Worker of the Month

Blair Cieluch, Pee Dee Foster Family and Licensing Support, has been named Social Worker of the Month for January 2021 by the [SC Foster Parent Association](#).

One family had this to say, "Blair was our licensing support worker for a couple of years before transferring counties, and she is still willing to help me with any questions I may have! She is accessible to her foster parents and if she doesn't know the answer – she will find it! I have been so blessed to have crossed paths with Blair. She is truly a gem and DSS is lucky to have her as an employee."

Thank you, Blair, for outstanding service to children and families!

For 125 years, [Epworth Children's Home](#) in Columbia has been dedicated to providing a safe, stable environment for those who need it most. Since its inception on January 20th, 1896, Epworth has grown and evolved but the mission has remained the same to serve as many children as possible, as well as possible, with all the resources available.



Epworth
Children's Home

Celebrating 125 Years

Children who go to Epworth learn life lessons of faith, responsibility, and hard work. Those lessons stay with them throughout life. Epworth has always emphasized growing productive citizens rather than simply feeding, clothing, and giving a child a place to live.

Epworth continues to grow with a second campus of 19 acres and 14 buildings, and the establishment of the Institute for Child and Family Wellbeing. Missional Hubs are being established across the state. They will enable children and families not only to be served on one of their two Columbia campuses, but also to be served in the communities in which they reside. Epworth is also developing new services that help strengthen families and prevent children from having to leave their homes and schools for reasons where safety is not an issue.

The South Carolina Department of Social Services would like to congratulate Epworth Children's Home on 125 years of service. We thank you for your partnership and continued work to promote the well-being of children, prevention services and providing foster care programs to help strengthen families. Congratulations!



FREE Upcoming Programs to Help Strengthen Families

Organizers with the [Growing Home Southeast Strengthening Families Program](#) are preparing for their Spring Session. The program is funded through the Duke Endowment, Children's Trust, and SCDSS.

Growing Home Southeast will begin their Spring Program on Tuesday, February 9, 2021. The program will be held virtually through Zoom. Program participants will receive weekly gift cards that help cover the cost of a meal at home, weekly incentives, rewards, and prizes. Each family that graduates the program also earns a

\$100 gift card and other graduation rewards. Families must have a child ages 6-11 and plan for all sessions in order to attend.

Call 803-791-5513 for more information.

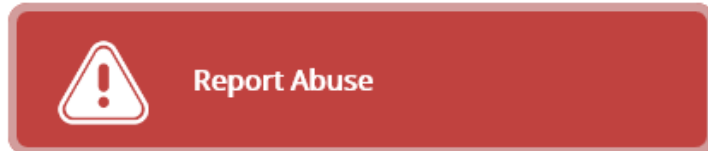


**Report abuse and neglect
of children and vulnerable adults.**

DSS
SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT of SOCIAL SERVICES

1-888-CARE4US

Click the red "Report Abuse" button to make an online report of suspected abuse and/or neglect, now!



Reporters may remain anonymous or provide contact information to receive follow up on the outcome of their report.

SC Department of Social Services
P.O. Box 1520
Columbia, SC 29202-1520



SC Department of Social Services | P.O. Box 1520, 1535 Confederate Ave., Columbia, SC 29202

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